

**Session title: ARCHAEOLOGY AS TIME TRAVEL**

**Organizers:** Cornelius Holtorf, Department of Human Sciences, University of Kalmar, Sweden  
Bodil Petersson, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Lund, Sweden

**Time:** Friday morning

**Room:** Gateway Building, Hall D2

**Session abstract:**

This session investigates the popular phenomenon of 'time-travelling' into the past. The papers will explore time-travelling in relation to:

- the changing character of understanding time and the past,
- emotional motivations and responses among producers and receivers,
- economic and commercial applications,
- the public presentation of the past in popular culture, museums, and virtual realities.

From a number of interdisciplinary perspectives (encompassing archaeology, ethnology, history, art history, and IT science) we will throw light on how and why people in our age wish to experience the past. This desire to travel to another age is not entirely new in the history of the modern world. But within the Experience Society, in the context of a growing tourist industry and fast developing Virtual Reality applications, time-travelling has been gaining ever larger audiences and significance for people's interest in the past.

The session will investigate time-travelling from two main perspectives. Some papers will be focusing on the material dimension, exploring the role of different kinds of sites and artefacts in evoking an experience of the past. Other papers will be putting archaeological time-travelling into the context of experiences of the past more generally. The presenters are linked to a new project on this issue based at the University of Lund, Sweden.

**Paper abstracts:**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE SESSION: TIME TRAVELLING AS A NEW WAY OF APPROACHING THE DISTANT PAST**

Cornelius Holtorf, Department of Human Sciences, University of Kalmar, Sweden

This paper discusses three major ways in which the distant past has been approached during the past two centuries. Traditionally, archaeologists and others have adopted a long-term evolutionary perspective that ultimately ranges from the first human beings to the present day. A second, critical perspective has been emphasising the politics of the past, scrutinizing how certain views of the past gain currency in particular present-day contexts and whose interests are served by them. Mostly I will be focusing in this paper on a third approach which is spreading fast in our age: that of time travelling to the past. People of all ages are increasingly interested in getting

to know the distant past by first hand experience as it were. Examples for that approach include virtual realities, historical films and novels, role play, living history, and first person interpretation. Ironically, many time travellers ultimately seek to find themselves in the past.

## **TRAVELS TO IDENTITY: VIKING RUNE-CARVERS OF TODAY**

Bodil Petersson, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Lund, Sweden

Today there are about ten active rune-stone carvers in the Nordic countries. By performing a technique of the past they revive an action with historical implications that bears an important aspect of identity shaping of today. Why do rune-carvers exist in the 21st century? Where do they erect stones with runic inscriptions? In what connections are these acts performed? In what relation stands this activity to the rune-stone carving of the past? I want to explore an aspect of using a Viking Age identity of today as expressed in reconstructing monuments relating to the past. This kind of time travel relates to the building of new identities based on past performances.

## **CRAFTS AS TIME TRAVEL**

Lars Erik Narmo, Lofotr Viking Museum, Norway

Crafts once created the archaeological material of the past. To most re-creation museums of Europe handicrafts is an important tool mediating ideas of the past to the present. Handicrafts are obviously an important tool; however there has been little concern about the theory and methodology. The field is divided between theory and practice, crosses different separate discussions of archaeology and mix professionals and the public in ways not accustomed or accepted in academic archaeology. Crafts as time travel is a complicated field which is (luckily) not tamed by archaeology – yet. I will shed some light on the philosophy of crafts as time travel by examples from Lofotr Viking Museum, North Norway.

## **VISITING THE MIDDLE AGES**

Erika Sandström, Department of History, Gotland University, Sweden

On the island of Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic, a Medieval Week is arranged every year. About 150 000 visitors, many of them dressed in some kind of medieval costume, travel to the island to take part in the event. Why? A historian would very much like to believe that they are genuinely interested in the Middle Ages and thus travel to Gotland to learn more, or to feel the wings of history. In some cases that is also the case. Most visitors have however a much wider set of reasons for coming to the island – some even claim to be uninterested in history. So what do people do when they travel to the Middle Ages – and what do they think that the Middle Ages were like?

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL OPEN AIR MUSEUMS AS TIME TRAVEL CENTRES**

Roeland Paardekooper, Department of Archaeology, University of Exeter, England

Experiencing the past in the open air has never been more popular than at present. Not only have many archaeological sites been transformed into tourist destinations (like on Malta), 'fake' prehistoric, Roman or medieval environments have been developed and are frequently visited by both tourists and school children. If in the past, these archaeological open air museums would refer to experimental archaeology as touchstone, presently these heritage centres are profiling themselves less with science and more with living history, experiencing and time travel. Does this make them of less quality than similar places in the 1980s? What are their success factors and whom are they doing it for?

## **GARBAGE AS TIME TRAVEL**

Lynn Åkesson, Department of Ethnology, University of Lund, Sweden

Garbage is central to archaeological research. From discarded things knowledge is extracted about economic and social patterns in the distant past. The archaeological time travel can, in relation with garbage, be combined with an ethnological time travel as well. The ethnological time travel shows cultural reduction and some products' quick disappearance. But it also shows revaluation, how discarded things become valuable. The hopelessly unfashionable can as time goes by be changed into desirable collector's objects or fashionable interior decoration. This is an emotional transformation of things.